

ANNUAL HEALTH REPORT.

Sheppey Rural District, 1909.

To the Chairman and Members of the Sheppey Rural District Council.

GENTLEMEN,

I beg to present to you my Annual Report on the health of the Sheppey Rural District for the year 1909.

In this report, the term "Minster District" will include Minster, Halfway, Rushenden, and Scrap's-gate; while "Eastchurch District" will include Eastchurch, Warden, Leysdown, and Elmley.

POPULATION.

As in my last Report, I have based my estimate of the population for this area on the average of 4.5 persons to each inhabited house; this, I think, locally, is preferable to the means adopted by the Registrar-General, owing to the increased erection of new houses which rapidly become occupied. The estimate is, therefore, 3,914; this number, although much higher than in 1908, I believe, if anything, to be an under-estimate. Minster District is calculated at 2,675, and that of Eastchurch 1,239.

AREA.

The area of the whole district is 21,203 acres, excluding water. Density of population, 0.13 per acre.

INHABITED HOUSES.

In the whole district there are 947 houses, of which 854 are occupied. Minster District, 631; occupied, 585. Eastchurch District, 316; occupied, 269.

I have made several visitations during the year, and have had otherwise opportunities of examining the surroundings of the houses, which, on the whole, are clean. I find the house accommodation of the working classes, at present, adequate and satisfactory. Except in a few cases, there is no overcrowding; these exceptions will receive attention during the coming year. There is ample open space around the dwellings, there being no back-to-back houses. I have, however, had to condemn two cottages at Eastchurch as unsuitable for habitation, which have since been pulled down. And at present there are, in Minster, one or two that will require attention.

A considerable number of new houses have been erected during 1909, and I believe that a much larger number is anticipated for 1910.

The erection of new houses is under the supervision of the Sanitary Authority. I, therefore, strongly recommend that, unless efficiently drained, the Council should in future withhold its approval of any house being erected on any land which, from past experience, is known to be inundated with water during heavy rain.

During the year several plots of land were sold for building purposes, too small to allow the necessary distance between the cess-pit and the house. By the action taken by the Council this has been remedied, but great care must be taken to guard against approval being given to build on such plots in future.

There are no common lodging-houses in the district.

Under the "Housing, Town Planning, etc., Act, 1909," the Council will have greatly increased powers with regard to habitations, etc., which, I hope, will be made use of, as occasions arise.

INHABITANTS.

The inhabitants of the district are employed principally in agriculture and dock labour. Their general condition is good, and comparatively little actual poverty exists.

BIRTHS.

The number of births registered for the whole district was 79, of which 48 were males and 31 females. This is a decrease of 18 births, compared with the previous year.

The following birth rate table for the last three years shows a steady decrease, notwithstanding the increase in population: 1907, 36.14; 1908, 29.41; 1909, 20.10. During 1908 there was only one district in Kent which showed a higher birth rate than the Sheppey Rural, and in no rural district was the rate lower than 20. This figure, however, was nearly reached in Sheppey during 1909. When the returns of the whole county are published, it will be interesting to note if this great decline is general. Of the two districts, Minster had: males, 35; females, 23; total, 58 (rate 21.68), a decrease of 3; and that of Eastchurch: males, 13; females, 8; total, 21 (rate 16.8), a decrease of 15. It will be seen that the decrease in the birth rate is due principally to the Eastchurch district. This gives a rate of 0.43 per cent. more males than females.

ILLEGITIMATE BIRTHS.

There were six illegitimate births registered during 1909, which is one more than in 1908. This gives a rate of 1.5 per 1,000 population, or 7.5 per cent. of births. This amounts to nearly 3 per cent. more than the figures for the whole of Kent Rural Districts in 1908, which was 4.7. Of these, 5 belonged to the Minster District (rate per mil. pop. 1.8, or percentage of births 8.17) and one to the Eastchurch District (rate per mil. pop. 0.8, or percentage of births 7.7).

STILL BIRTHS.

Minster District had 7 (rate per mil. pop. 2.6), Eastchurch District 5 (rate per mil. pop. 5.6), total 12 (rate 3.06). These results are obtained from burial certificates alone, and are probably only those of children born nearly at full time. These higher figures show the great necessity there is that all still births should be registered in the same manner as those born alive. This high rate of still births for the Eastchurch District may account somewhat for its low birth rate. I believe all these still births to be of legitimate origin.

The "Notification of Births Act" has not been adopted in this district. Although I do not think its adoption, at present, necessary, yet later it may be, owing to the assistance it would afford in the supervision of Midwives.

MARRIAGES.

There were 20 marriages in 1909, a rate of 5.1 per mil. pop.—Minster District, 13 (rate 4.86), Eastchurch District 7 (rate 5.64).

DEATHS.

The number of deaths of residents registered in the whole district was 46, a death rate of 11.75 per mil. pop. Of these, 32 were males (rate 8.1) and 14 females (rate 3.6). The former exceeded the latter by over 50 per cent. In the Minster District there were 33 (rate 12.34), of which 20 were males (rate 7.4) and 13 females (rate 4.8). In the Eastchurch District there were 13 (rate 10.49), of which 12 were males (rate 9.6) and one female (rate 0.7). By this, it will be seen that the death rate of males in the Eastchurch District was 2.2 higher than that of Minster, and, of females, 4.1 less. Compared with 1908, the rate for the whole district is 0.05 lower. The births of males exceeded the deaths by 16, and of females 17, which is practically equal. The total births over deaths being 33.

The causes of death were as follows:—Heart Disease, 8 (rate per 1,000 pop., 2.04), Paralysis 6 (1.5), Bronchitis 5 (1.2), Pneumonia 4 (1.0), Senile Decay 4 (1.0), Premature Birth 3 (0.8), Enteric Fever, Cancer, Suicide, and Convulsions 2 each (0.5), Diphtheria, Influenza, Intestinal Obstruction, Erysipelas, Venereal Disease, Diabetes, Phthisis and Accidents one each (0.2). Total, 46.

Incurable Diseases accounted for 29 (rate 0.8).

The deaths from Cancer and Phthisis were 2 and 1 respectively less than in 1908.

AGES AT WHICH DEATH OCCURRED.

Under 15 years—Minster, males 5, females 5; total 10. Eastchurch, 0. Between 15 and 65—Minster, males 10, females 2; total, 12. Eastchurch, males 3, females 1; total, 4. Over 65 years—Minster, males 7, females 4; total, 11. Eastchurch, males 9, females 0; total, 9.

Of deaths occurring during the wage-earning period, 4 were in the Eastchurch and 12 in the Minster District. Total, 16. The causes being: Pneumonia 3, Heart Disease 3, Enteric Fever 2, Erysipelas, Phthisis, Venereal Disease, and Diabetes 1 each, Accidents and Suicides 3.

UNCERTIFIED DEATHS.

Excluding Inquest Cases, there were 4 deaths uncertified by medical practitioners (8.6 per cent); two were infants (premature birth, 2 days; and convulsions, 3 months) and two adults (heart failure and pneumonia). Three of these were reported to the Coroner, but from the information given inquests were not deemed necessary. The case of pneumonia was that of a person insane, who died in the Workhouse Infirmary. In such cases a Coroner's certificate is required.

DEATHS IN INSTITUTIONS.

There were 5 non-residents and 8 residents (total 13) who died in the Sheppey Union Infirmary. Of the total deaths of residents occurring in the district, 17.4 per cent. died in the Workhouse. The percentage of the total population that died in the Workhouse was 0.2.

INFANTILE MORTALITY.

The low number of deaths of children under one year is very satisfactory. They were: Premature Births, 3; Bronchitis, 2; Convulsions, 2; total, 7. The rate per 1,000 births being 88.5, which is 4.29 less than the previous year. If we deduct the premature births (3), it will leave only 4 who died from disease, a rate of a little over 50 per mil. births.

There were no deaths from Diarrhœa, neither were there any deaths of illegitimate children.

There has been no action taken under "The Children's Act, 1908," although on one or two occasions I have had to warn parents, who were not as careful as they should be in regard to leaving children alone with an unguarded fire.

With the exception of the foster-parents of the boarded-out children, there are no persons in the district receiving children under seven years of age for payment. I may here state that the condition of the boarded-out children in the rural district is exceedingly good. Their general appearance and manners are sufficient proof of the care and attention they are receiving from their foster-parents.

INFECTIOUS DISEASES.

The number of cases notified under the Act was 35, being 15 more than 1908. This increase was due to an excess of Erysipelas and Diphtheria, of which latter disease there were no cases in 1908.

DIPHTHERIA.

Eight cases, all of which were in the Minster District; and were traced to infection from Queenborough. All occurred between the ages of 5 and 15, with the exception of one child, under the age of 5, who died.

ERYSIPELAS.

Minster District, 5; Eastchurch District, 8; total, 13. All were mild cases, except one, which occurred at the age of 35, and was fatal.

SCARLET FEVER.

Minster District, 3; Eastchurch District, 7; total, 10. There were four cases in or near Leysdown. The first (in January) was imported from London. The second (in July) was that of a school teacher, who was reported during the stage of desquamation, during which time she was teaching at the school. The origin of this case was probably Sittingbourne. The third and fourth cases, which occurred in December, were of two children attending the school, where the infected teacher taught. Whether they contracted the disease at so distant a date it is difficult to say, but no other origin could be traced. At Eastchurch there were three cases, two of which were probably contracted from a "return"

case from London, but the origin of the other case could not be traced. At Scrap's-gate there was a case in September, which had recently arrived from Leysdown, so possibly may have been contracted from the said school teacher. At Halfway Houses, one case, a stoker in the Navy: origin untraced, but undoubtedly outside of the district. Another case, living near Sheerness, and probably contracted from that town. All these cases were of a mild type, only one (a boarded-out child) was sent to the Isolation Hospital, but this was owing to having been admitted to the Union Infirmary during the early stages. The others were carefully and efficiently isolated in their homes, and all children who had been in contact with them were ordered to be kept away from school, to be under observation. So that no further cases developed. The school teacher above-mentioned was admitted to the Milton Fever Hospital.

ENTERIC FEVER.

There were four cases, all of which were in the Minster District. One was admitted to the Isolation Hospital from Queenborough, one developed the disease shortly after arriving from London. The other two were fatal, one of which was reported as Enteric, but it is doubtful if it were that disease. The other fatal case was of a very virulent character, and was undoubtedly traced to the consumption of oysters, collected from Windmill Creek. This case was brought to the notice of the Council at the time, and, concerning which, I corresponded with the Medical Officer of Health of Sittingbourne, who communicated with the Fishmongers' Company on the matter, with the result that he received a letter from the Secretary of the Company, of which the following is an extract:—

“The Fishmongers' Company has prohibited oysters taken from Windmill Creek and Elmley Ferry, but, of course, the Company is quite powerless to deal with those who casually pick up oysters. So far as the above-named beds are concerned, no oysters taken from them are allowed to be marketted.”

TUBERCULOSIS.

During the year the Order issued by the Local Government Board came into force, requiring the Poor Law Medical Officers to report all cases of Pulmonary Tuberculosis occurring in paupers under their care. It is regrettable that the Order does not include all cases of Tuberculosis, and extend to all classes. No doubt, in future, there is hope that this will be done. Only one case of Pulmonary Tuberculosis was reported under the Order, which was that of a pauper who had moved from Sheerness into this district. I believe there are very few cases in the district. Only one fatal case has been registered, and that was of a man who had come from London shortly before his death.

There is no special accommodation in this district for cases of Pulmonary Tuberculosis, either for advanced or earlier cases of the disease.

I should recommend that the Council supply, free of cost, Tuberculin for diagnostic purposes, to be used by me, or under my supervision. So that early cases could be recognised, and means taken to deal with them.

DIARRHŒA.

There was very little Summer Diarrhœa in 1909, although there was a slight epidemic of diarrhœa, having a dysenteric form, but no deaths.

MEASLES and WHOOPING COUGH

Were present only in a few cases.

GLANDULAR FEVER.

There was an epidemic which spread through the District, having the characteristics of this disease, but only in a few cases were there any serious after-effects.

VACCINATION.

During 1909, of the 79 births registered, 54 were unvaccinated. During 1908 there were 44 unvaccinated out of 97; this gives a total in two years of 98 out of 176 born (more than 55 per cent.) who are left unprotected against any further epidemic of small-pox. The parents of these children, through the unadvised leniency given them to avoid vaccination, are incurring a most grave responsibility, very few of whom, I fear, being genuine, conscientious objectors.

The County Medical Officer of Health publishes a weekly return of the notifiable diseases occurring in the various districts. This will be a great advantage, as it will facilitate tracing any infectious disease in persons arriving from, or visiting, an infected area.

ISOLATION HOSPITAL.

The Isolation Hospital is in good repair, clean, and well equipped, and is in constant readiness for any emergency. In my last report, I drew the attention of the Council to the entrance to the Hospital, which was so awkwardly situated that a stretcher could not be carried from the corridor into the ward. This has now been altered, so that patients can now be taken into the ward without being removed from the stretcher. The Hospital, however, is not properly equipped with means for satisfactory disinfection.

During the year the Hospital has been opened for three cases. A case of enteric fever from Queenborough and one each of scarlet fever and measles, which were sent there from the Workhouse. It is important that patients should be kept in the Hospital sufficiently long to prevent them being a danger on returning home. It sometimes happens that patients are prematurely discharged, and as a result attempts have been made to obtain damages from the Authorities. To avoid this claim for damages, and to give the discharged patients instruction what to do on returning home, the Swindon Fever Hospital Authorities issue a leaflet to those in charge of the discharged patient. Through the courtesy of the Medical Officer of Health of Swindon, I have received a copy of this leaflet, and I recommend that the Council should have similar ones printed for the same purpose.

It reads as follows:—

“Every possible care is taken to ascertain that patients are free of infection before their discharge from hospital, “and no responsibility can be taken by the Board in the event of infection occurring after they have left the Institution among persons with whom they may have come in contact. It occasionally happens that discharges from the

"throat, nose, and ears may arise after leaving hospital, which may prove capable of infecting others. In such cases, "medical aid should be at once sought and the patient isolated, or application be made for re-admission to the isolation "hospital. Recently discharged patients should be kept as much as possible to themselves for at least 14 days after "leaving hospital, and should not be allowed to sleep with other persons. The practice of kissing should be carefully "avoided, as it is in the cavities of the mouth, throat, and nose that infection may lurk which it has not been possible "to detect."

AMBULANCE.

The Sheppey Board of Guardians are considering the advisability of purchasing an ambulance waggon, which the Council will be permitted to use. This will be a great advantage, as it will do away with the difficulty, now existing, in transferring patients to the Hospital.

SEWAGE.

Minster District: The night soil, of those who possess earth-closets, is satisfactorily removed about three times a week, by public scavenger, and sold for manure. But in the case where middens are used, the condition is very unsatisfactory, as the pits are only emptied at long intervals, and thereby become offensive. In those parts of the district, which will come under the future drainage scheme, this difficulty will be in a great measure overcome. But as there are many parts in the Minster District that will not benefit by the drainage, I think the Council should do its utmost to induce owners of houses to introduce the earth-closet. At any rate, it is most advisable that the Council should refuse to pass any plans for building which do not provide accommodation for earth-closets.

Eastchurch District: In this District there is, unfortunately, no scavenging done, so that the majority of the closets are middens, which, owing to the infrequency of emptying, are, in many cases, rapidly becoming a nuisance. I therefore strongly recommend that, as there is at present no prospect of drainage, a system of public scavenging should be instituted without delay. If this were done, I believe that many of the householders would introduce the earth-closets, in place of the very objectionable alternative. There would be no difficulty in disposing of the soil for manuring purposes.

Leysdown: I find that the sewers at Leysdown have practically no outlet, and that they have been used to receive the contents of the drains from the w.c.'s, thereby converting the sewers into a huge cesspit, which ventilates into the main road. This is not only a grave public nuisance, but constitutes a serious menace to health. I brought the matter before the Council, and a resolution was passed to compel the owners to cut off any connection between the sewers and the w.c. drains.

CESSPITS,

Into which the drains carry off the water from the houses are an unavoidable objection, which, at present, cannot, unfortunately, be done away with, but, in buildings about to be erected, the Council should absolutely forbid any cess-pit being in any way connected with a w.c. I should further recommend that cess-pits should be emptied by, or under the supervision of, the Sanitary Authority, as this is the only way which will ensure it being efficiently and regularly done.

ROADS.

The roads are, on the whole, in good condition, but the ditches are in many places faulty. Where roads cross, the ditches come to a blind end, so that during heavy rain they rapidly fill up and overflow across the road. In some places iron pipes are laid down to prevent this. To avoid damage to the roads, these pipes should be more extensively used.

The pathway running between the backs of the houses of Belmont and Halfway Roads is in a most filthy condition. Ditches from the back premises of these houses enter this lane, discharging water, which appears to be the overflow of cess-pits, and which ultimately finds its way into the roadway. This requires immediate attention.

WATER SUPPLY.

The water supply to the district is sufficient, wholesome, and free from pollution. It is derived from deep wells, reaching the main springs in the green sand, and supplied by Public Water Companies. Also from wells, varying in depth from 50 to 75 feet deep. I have made a chemical analysis of the water from the various sources, and find them pure and suitable for all domestic purposes. There is no plumbo-solvent action.

In my last report, I drew the attention of the Council to the water supply of Eastchurch, which showed an excess of nitrates. This year I have made four examinations, but have only found the presence of nitrates on one occasion. Periodical examinations of this spring will be made during the coming year.

DAIRIES AND COWSHEDS.

These are, on the whole, satisfactory, and the utensils are well cleaned, there being an abundant supply of water. I was present at some of the sheds during milking-time, the cows appeared to be healthy and in good condition. During the year I shall make suggestions that will, I hope, entail the work in the cowsheds being more systematically done. There is no milk imported into the district.

No action has been taken by the Council in causing dairy cows to be examined by veterinary surgeons, although should any suspicious cases arise this no doubt would be done.

SLAUGHTER HOUSES.

There are two in the district, which I have visited during slaughtering, and found no cause for complaint.

I have had many opportunities for examining meat exposed for sale, but on no occasion has it been necessary to condemn any. There was one case, however, where I was requested by the owner to examine the carcasses of two pigs, which were of a suspicious nature. Unfortunately, I had to condemn them, but they were not for marketing purposes.

No action, therefore, has been taken or needed under the "Sale of Foods and Drugs Act," nor under Section 117 of the Public Health Act, 1875.

There is no inspector in the district with a special certificate in meat inspection.

No cases of Glanders, Anthrax, or Hydrophobia in man have occurred in the district, and no case has been reported as taking place in animals. Should, however, any cases in animals come under my notice, I should recommend that the Council apply to the Local Government Board for approval to extend the provisions of the Notification Act to these diseases.

BAKERY.

There is only one Bakery in the district, which is above ground, and in a perfectly sanitary condition.

OFFENSIVE AND DANGEROUS TRADES.

Of these, there are none in the district.

FACTORIES.

There is at present only one factory (the Minster Steam Laundry). This is carried on in a perfectly sanitary manner. There is a sufficient supply of good drinking water, and the lavatories, separate for both sexes, are clean. The closets, which are of the midden type, are satisfactorily emptied periodically.

SCHOOLS.

The walls, roofs, and gutters of the buildings are in proper repair. The lighting, ventilation, and heating are sufficient. The latter is by stoves or open fires. It is regrettable that the schools are not heated by a system of hot water or steam. It is to be hoped that the new schools to be erected in Halfway will contain some such system. It is desirable that the schools be more frequently scrubbed than they are at present. The pegs, as I reported last year, are situated too closely together, allowing the danger incurred from clothes overlapping. Since my last report, the w.c.—which was objectionably near the girls' class-room at Eastchurch—has been removed to a more distant part. The new w.c. is of the trough variety, the contents of which are washed away by the surface water from the playgrounds into a cess-pit in the vicinity of the playground, the overflow of which, I believe, enters the parish drains used for carrying off the village surface water. I do not know if the Council gave its approval for these drains to be used in this manner.

LEYSDOWN SCHOOL.

I would recommend that the door at the foot of the staircase of this school should be made to open outwards, so that there would not be the danger of its becoming jammed in case of a rush.

For the same reasons that I stated in my last report, I must again express objection to the schools (except during holidays) being used for meetings or entertainments in the evening, especially when smoking is allowed, which gives rise to expectoration and its consequent evils.

I should here like to make a protest against the system in vogue of granting silver medals to children who have not missed a day's attendance at school. As children, when totally unfit to attend school will do so in order not to run the risk of losing the prize. Two such cases came under my notice last year. It does not seem justifiable to attract a child to school in order to maintain the attendance average, when the condition of the child's health does not allow of any educational advantage. Further, it induces children who may be in the early stage of an infectious disease to withhold any complaint of their indisposition for fear of losing their marks, and therefore their chance of obtaining the medal.

THE MIDWIFERY ACT.

This Act will come into force on the 1st April, 1910. The difficulties that I feared, owing to the scattered nature of the district, shows some signs of being somewhat abated. The Guardians of the Sheppey Union, at my request, have intimated their intention to try, for one year commencing in April, a scheme whereby women who, either through the absence of a certified midwife or, owing to the distance, through the inability to obtain the services of a doctor, can be admitted to the Infirmary as private or paying patients: by paying a fee of 10/0 and the cost of their maintenance for 14 days, which would amount to 11/0 or 12/0 more. This, of course, refers to normal cases. Abnormal cases, which would require special care and maintenance, would have to pay a correspondingly higher amount. In my annual report to you, as the Local Supervising Authority of Midwives, I shall go more fully into this question.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.

- 1.—To withhold permission to build on land known to be inundated during heavy rain.
- 2.—To induce householders to replace the midden with earth-closets.
- 3.—To refuse to pass plans in which accommodation is not made for earth-closets, which can be converted later, if necessary, into water-closets.
- 4.—To forbid cess-pits being in communication with a w.c. drain.
- 5.—That cess-pits and middens be emptied under the supervision of the Sanitary Authority.
- 6.—To institute a system of scavenging at Eastchurch.
- 7.—To allow a more liberal supply of iron pipes for use at cross roads.
- 8.—To induce Managers of Schools not to allow the schools to be used for evening entertainments, except during the holidays.
- 9.—To issue leaflets to patients on their discharge from Isolation Hospital.
- 10.—To supply Tuberculin for diagnostic purposes.
- 11.—To take measures to abate the nuisance in the pathway at Halfway.
- 12.—To induce the Managers of Leysdown School to alter the door at the foot of staircase.

I am, Gentlemen, your obedient servant,

THOMAS R. WIGLESWORTH, M.D., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P.,

Medical Officer, Sheppey Rural District Council.

